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ABSTRACT

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Interpersonal Consequences of Sex-Typing and Androgyny: A Behavioral Analysis

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Abstract

New measures of sex role style assess the respondent's self-attribution of sex-typed interpersonal characteristics. In light of claims that androgynous roles are related to behavioral flexibility, the current study investigated the relationship between sex role orientations and performance in interpersonal situations. Males and females in each of four sex role categories (masculine-typed, feminine-typed, androgynous and indeterminate) role-played situations requiring the appropriate expression of either commendatory or negative assertiveness. Androgynous subjects were most effective in rated social skills components for both types of situations, while indeterminates were highly ineffective. Complex interpersonal situations apparently require the use of well-integrated masculine and feminine social skills.

Interpersonal Consequences of Sex-Typing and Androgyny: A Behavioral Analysis

During the past several years, new conceptual models of sex-role functioning have been proposed by Constantinople (1973), Bem (1974), Spence and her associates (1975) and Berzins (1975). In contrast to previous models of sex-typing which defined masculinity and femininity as "either-or," mutually-exclusive opposites, the conceptual framework proposed by these investigators invites us to now construe masculinity and femininity as orthogonal, separate and unrelated dimensions of culturally-valued characteristics. By defining as masculine such characteristics as forceful, assertive, dominant and instrumental; and by defining as feminine such descriptions as emotional, sensitive, gentle, tender and expressive; and, further, by proposing that these two domains are separate, unrelated dimensions, four sex-role category outcomes become possible. Masculine-typing is defined by Bem, Spence and Berzins as the endorsement of primarily masculine self-attributes and the relative nonendorsement of feminine self-attributes. Thus, masculine-typed persons describe themselves as using primarily assertive, forceful, dominant, or cognitive strategies, and report being less likely to use softer, feminine behaviors. Feminine-typing is psychometrically defined as the endorsement of more than the median number of feminine characteristics and fewer than the median number of masculine characteristics on sex role inventories such as the Bem scale (BSRI; Bem, 1974), the Personal Attributes Questionnaire (PAQ; Spence et al., 1975) or the ANDRO Scale (Berzins et al., 1975). If their

self-descriptions are accurate, feminine-typed persons should be expected to rely mostly on gentle, sensitive, expressive skills and less frequently on forceful, masculine strategies.

Psychological "androgyny" has received the greatest attention in these new formulations. Since current sex-role inventories independently assess the respondent's masculine and feminine self-descriptions, it has been possible to define androgynous roles as the high endorsement of each variety of characteristics. Thus, persons labelled as androgynous in the new sex role literature are those who describe themselves as both forceful and sensitive, both assertive and tender, etc. A fourth sex role category outcome is also possible; individuals may endorse relatively few (more specifically, below the sample's median number) of each form of characteristics. Termed "undifferentiated," these individuals seem to be rejecting both positive masculine and positive feminine traits.

This new sex role model has stimulated a good deal of research activity, especially with respect to investigating the potential adjustment advantages of androgynous roles. A number of investigators have related sex role style and androgyny to self-reported levels of self-esteem (Bem, in press; Spence et al., 1975; Wetter, 1975), personality characteristics (Berzins, 1975), patterns of extracurricular activities and autobiographical histories (Woods, 1975) and perceived parenting practices (Kelly & Worell, 1976). However, this literature has relied entirely on self-report data of various kinds. Correlating self-reported sex role adjectives with self-reported personality data represents an initial step in the validation of new sex role constructs. But at the

same time, it leaves one with a certain amount of uneasiness, especially with regard to questions like unknown, but perhaps substantial "method variance" carried by the exclusive use of self-report procedures (Campbell & Fiske, 1959). Independent of self-report differences, are new formulations of sex role style differentially related to adaptive behavior in social situations? Bem and her co-workers have partially addressed this problem with a series of studies intended to determine whether androgynous persons more readily engage in cross-typed behavior, and whether (as she argues) rigid sex-typing inhibits behavioral flexibility (Bem, 1975; Bem & Lenney, 1976; Bem, Martyna & Watson, 1976).

In the study we will describe today, we sought to more directly test the hypothesis that sex role styles would be differentially related to the capacity to effectively refuse the unreasonable demands of others ("refusal assertion") or to warmly compliment the positive behavior of a peer ("commendatory behavior"). If the conceptual model advocated by Bem is correct, we would expect that, regardless of gender, masculine-typed persons should excel in refusal assertion capabilities (since being able to convincingly assert oneself is culturally masculine); feminine-typed persons should excel in the ability to warmly compliment another person; androgynous persons should do each well; and undifferentiated styles should be related to massive social deficits. We decided to use a role-playing paradigm to behaviorally assess these interpersonal skills and adopted the social skills assessment procedure used extensively by Eisler and his associates (1973; 1974; 1975).

Before presenting our results, I would like to describe some general

issues which guided the study. First, we have observed that the characteristics or self-descriptions which comprise sex role inventories like the Bem scale have, almost exclusively, interpersonal behavioral referents. Stated simply, the sex role typology to which an individual is assigned is based largely on that person's descriptions of his or her interpersonal style. Second, the question of correspondence between an individual's self-reports of these characteristics and his or her actual behavior in interpersonal settings was of direct interest to us. This raises the old thorny question of predicting specific behavior from self-report data (Mischel, 1968), but nonetheless is crucial for externally-validating new sex role constructs. Finally, we would like to propose that what have been called "sex roles" are, at a more basic level, social skills. Thus, sex role styles can be more constructively viewed as behavioral strategies for obtaining (and maintaining) social reinforcements, using principally assertive, forceful, dominant skills, principally tender, gentle, emotional skills, or having the breadth of repertoire to use both kinds of competencies, or presumably lacking social competence in many areas. And, it follows, one useful way to examine this is to look at the behavior of persons in reasonably complex interpersonal situations.

In the current study, 94 male and female college students were administered the Bem Sex Role Inventory (BSRI), and were classified as masculine-typed, feminine-typed, androgynous or undifferentiated using the median cutoff procedure advocated by Spence et al. (1975) and, more recently, Bem (in press).[1] Thirty males and 30 females were randomly selected to participate in the role-playing sessions to be described.

Eight role-playing scenes were adapted from the Behavioral Assertiveness Test (Eisler et al., 1973; 1975); four scenes are designed to elicit refusal assertion when the subject is confronted with the unreasonable behavior of another person, while four assess the ability of the subject to compliment the partner's positive behavior. In all cases, a female research assistant served as a live role playing partner. For each of the eight scenes, a brief narrative was read to the subject describing a situation in which the person could find himself or herself with another person. Following each narration, the partner "played the part" of this other person and delivered a 1-line prompt directly to the subject. The subject was seated next to the partner and responded directly to her. The role-playing sessions were presented in randomized order and were audiotaped.[2]

The audiotapes were later rated on a number of social skills components by a research assistant; a second judge independently rated 25% of all tapes to establish inter-rater reliabilities. These reliabilities averaged .96. For all scenes, ratings were made of the subject's speech latencies, loudness, affect (appropriate emotionality), speech duration and speech dysfluencies. Refusal assertion scenes were rated for noncompliance to the partner's unreasonable demands and commendatory scenes for the subject verbally praising the partner.

For each sex, the four sex role categories were compared on each social skills component using analyses of variance and multiple comparisons tests. Looking first at the results for males, several patterns are

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Insert Table I about here

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evident. First, most group differences for males occurred on commendatory scenes; as we will see, for females, it was the refusal assertion scenes that maximally differentiated sex role categories. Among males, it appears that the androgynous subjects consistently "look best," especially relative to their undifferentiated role counterparts. They speak loudly, with convincingly warm affect and assertiveness in complimenting their partner. On the refusal scenes, again androgynous males perform well and undifferentiated subjects do worse. Examining the results further, we see that masculine-typed males also frequently differ from undifferentiated males; to oversimplify the pattern, it seems that both masculine-typed and androgynous males do well on commendatory scenes, while undifferentiated subjects seem least effective.

Turning to females, we find that most group differences occur in the

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Insert Table II about here

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refusal assertion role-played scenes. For females, androgynous roles are clearly associated with effective, appropriate refusal assertion skills; relative to the androgynous female, her undifferentiated and feminine-typed counterparts were rated as less effective in handling the unreasonable demands of the partner. Masculine-typed females rarely differed from the other role categories.

Let's summarize these results and speculate a bit. First of all, the findings indicate that self-reported sex-role style is differentially related to behavioral social skills in this role playing paradigm. Androgynous

subjects, in particular, seem to handle themselves best, while undifferentiated roles seem to be (for both sexes) associated with socially unskilled, ineffective behavior. The fact that most group differences for males were found on commendatory, warm scenes, and that most differences for females were on refusal scenes is interesting; it suggests that warmth for females and refusal assertion for males may be sufficiently high probability behaviors that role category differences are obscured. When "cross-typed" behaviors are required, the group differences do occur. But in most cases, it was the androgynous and undifferentiated roles which maximally differed from each other, and these groups seemed to define the extreme ends of a social competency dimension. And, it was surprising that masculine-typed and feminine-typed groups never differed from each other, although both these groups did differ in some cases from the androgynous and undifferentiated categories. Why might this be? Perhaps it is naive and simplistic to assume that in the course of real social interactions, masculine-typed persons are usually assertive, feminine-typed persons usually expressive, androgynous persons both and undifferentiated persons neither. It seems more plausible that effective social functioning requires the well-modulated blending of both forceful, dominant skills and gentle, warm skills. Our results, at least, suggest that what has been called "psychological androgyny" really represents the upper end of a social competency dimension and what has been called "undifferentiated" roles seem to be the deficient end of such a social competency repertoire. The unexpected performance of sex-typed persons in our study is a bit unclear, but certainly suggests that when the social skills correlates of sex-typed BSRI categories are behaviorally

assessed, the pattern is more complex than a simple "feminine-typed persons are expressive, masculine-typed persons are assertive" formulation would predict.

Where does this line of research taks us? Hopefully, toward a de-emphasis on typologies, such as "masculine," "feminine," or "androgynous," and a closer examination of the social skills referents for such labels. Establishing social skills correlates to sex role inventories represents an essential step in the external validation of new inventories and of constructs such as androgyny. On a more basic level, we might consider defining sex roles as particular, identifiable interpersonal-social skills. At this level, the potential for new research in the area seems substantial.

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Footnotes

Portions of this research were also presented in the paper, "Sex Roles as Social Skills: A Behavioral Analysis of Masculinity, Femininity and Androgyny," at the Association for the Advancement of Behavior Therapy, Tenth Annual Meeting, New York, December, 1976.

[1]Bem formerly defined androgyny as a nonsignificant ($p > .10$) student t ratio between masculinity and femininity scores on the BSRI. In contrast, Spence et al. (1975) advocate a median split quadrant procedure to yield separate high masc-high fem (androgynous) versus low masc-low fem (undifferentiated) categories. Recently, Bem (in press) has revised her scoring procedure and now follows the median split quadrant procedure used in the current study.

[2]An example of one of the refusal assertion scenes is:

Narration: "You go to a ballgame with reserved seat tickets. When you arrive, you find that someone has put her coat in the seat you have reserved seat tickets for. You ask her to remove the coat and she says that she is saving the seat for a friend. She says,"

Partner: "I'm sorry, this seat is saved."

Response: _____

An example of one of the commendatory assertion scenes is:

Narration: "You are in a restaurant and the waitress has just served an excellent meal cooked just the way you like it. You are pleased with her prompt, efficient service. She says,"

Partner: "Hope you enjoyed your dinner."

Response: _____

Table 1

Multiple Comparisons Tests on Rated Social Skills Components for Males

Variable	Sex Role Category Means: Masc-typed n = 8	Fem-typed n = 7	Androgynous n = 6	Indeter. n = 9
Commendatory Scenes				
Latency (in sec.)	$1.05^{\underline{I}}$	1.15	1.10	$1.86^{\underline{M}}$
Loudness	2.80^{I}	2.61	2.95^{I}	2.27^{MA}
Affect	2.76	3.07^{I}	2.83^{I}	2.34^{FA}
Overall Assertion	3.11^{I}	3.00	2.93^{I}	2.37^{MA}
Speech Dysfluencies	$0.16^{\underline{I}}$	$0.14^{\underline{I}}$	0.46	$0.62^{\underline{MF}}$
Negative Assertiveness Scenes				
Loudness	3.00	2.90	3.49^{I}	2.67^{A}
Affect	2.84	2.80	3.20^{I}	2.42^{A}

Note. Superscripts associated with a given mean indicate that the mean differs significantly ($p < .05$ or $p < .01$) from any other means abbreviated by the superscript with a least significant difference (lsd) test (Winer, 1971). Trend ($p < .10$) differences are indicated by italicized superscripts. Table means for latency are in seconds, and all other component means are based on a 1 to 5 rating scale.

Table 2

Multiple Comparisons Tests on Rated Social Skills Components for Females

	Sex Role Category Means			
	Masc-typed	Fem-typed	Androgynous	Indeter.
Variable	n = 7	n = 8	n = 9	n = 6
Commendatory Scenes				
Latency (in sec.)	1.02	0.96	0.91^{I}	1.42^{A}
Negative Assertiveness Scenes				
Latency (in sec.)	1.12^{I}	1.26^{I}	1.62	2.13^{MF}
Loudness	2.93	2.33^{A}	3.28^{FI}	2.54^{A}
Affect	2.50^{A}	2.53^{A}	3.25^{MFI}	2.50^{A}
Overall Assertion	2.82	2.71	3.36^{I}	2.63^{A}
Wolpe-Lazarus Scale	17.14	15.75^{A}	21.11^{IF}	14.33^{A}